QL
692
K4K45X

Kenya Birds

Volume 1, Number 1 June 1992

SMITHSONIAN
JAN 2 0 2000
LIBRARIES

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and the Kenya Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation.

Editors: Leon Bennun, Cecilia Gichuki and John Fanshawe

Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P. O. Box 40658, Nairobi

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Editorial

Kenya Birds is a new publication that will take a popular look at birds, birding and bird conservation in Kenya. It incorporates and expands on "Avifauna News", the newsletter of the Department of Ornithology, and the first two issues covering 1992 will be sent to everyone who received the newsletter. Welcome!

Kenya Birds will appear twice a year and we intend it to provide up to date information on all aspects of Kenya's diverse birdlife. We hope that it will be enjoyable and informative reading for anyone interested in birds. As with "Avifauna News", we encourage readers to contribute short articles and records of interest.

Regular feature articles in each issue will focus on a particular theme. In this issue the theme is coastal birds and their habitats. Such articles will include accounts of particular rare species and bird conservation projects, and guides to good birding sites. If you would like to contribute an article, let us know: the theme of the next issue will be birds and birding around Nairobi. We also invite ornithologists undertaking research in Kenya to present popular accounts of their work in each **Kenya Birds**. (Scientific papers and notes should be submitted to our sister journal **Scopus** (see page 5).

The first two issues of **Kenya Birds** are being produced and circulated free of charge. From the start of next year, however, we will need to introduce a moderate annual subscription. Details will be circulated with the next issue: we hope that readers will have enjoyed the publication enough to remain with us. We also hope that you will support the magazine by continuing to send in your notes and articles! In the meantime, we would welcome constructive criticisms about any aspect of **Kenya Birds**.

Please address all correspondence to: The Editors, **Kenya Birds**, Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P. O. Box 40658 Nairobi, Kenya.

Front cover illustration: Crab Plovers *Dromas ardeola* from a vignette by Dale Zimmerman. Typesetting and layout: Graecon Ink. Printed in Kenya by AMREF, Wilson Airport, P. O. Box 30125, Nairobi.

News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

October 1991 saw the production of the last issue of the old-style **Avifauna News**. It has been a busy time in the Department since then. January and February 1992 were almost entirely taken up with fieldwork for most members of staff. As well as the waterfowl counts at various Rift Valley lakes (see below), there were extended field expeditions to the Trans-Mara Forest and to Lake Turkana. In Trans–Mara, part of the little-known Mau Forest complex in south-western Kenya, the forest team (Leon Bennun, Edward Waiyaki, Patrick Gichuki and George Amutete) carried out monitoring work intended to assess the impact of upgrading the Olenguruone-Silibwet track that presently runs right through the forest. Conditions were wet and difficult much of the time, but during intensive mist-netting and observation work we obtained a number of new records, including Buff-spotted Pygmy Crake. Although a newcomer might not believe it, at other times of year it is even wetter and colder in the Mau forests: we found evidence that that many species were breeding during this relatively dry, warm period — in marked contrast to our surveys last year in July and August.

Travelling almost direct from Trans-Mara to Turkana provided a rather shocking climatic contrast. In the torrid heat of Loiyengalani we joined colleagues from the University of Pavia and the National Institute of Wildlife Biology in Italy in an expedition to census and study waterbirds around the lake, one of our most important but least-known wetlands. An aerial survey of the whole lake was backed up by extensive work on the ground along 50 km of shoreline near Loiyengalani, including detailed studies of habitat choice and behaviour and some ringing work. Other studies were carried out on the ecology of the Crested Lark, the only common land-bird in the desolate lava wastes around Loiyengalani. Full results will be published next year. Six members of the Department took part at one stage or another of this exciting expedition, and we thank Olivetti Equatorial Ltd. and Sogei Ltd. for making this possible through their generous sponsorship.

In January the National Museums signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a joint project with the Peregrine Fund, Inc., a raptor conservation organisation based in Idaho, USA. Birds of prey are important parts of ecological systems, and are excellent environmental indicators, but they are often misunderstood and face numerous threats including habitat loss, pesticide poisoning and direct persecution by humans. Local raptor expert Simon Thomsett, who is co-ordinating the project, hopes to counter these threats through a programme of

research and education. As one of the first joint activities under this project, the Department and the Peregrine Fund are organising a short course on raptor biology for post-graduate students, to take place in July.

Work on the Kenya Crane and Wetlands Project continues, although there is less activity in the field now that Nathan Gichuki has returned to Cambridge University to complete his PhD thesis. We wish him well with this arduous task. Peter Kuria, who was working as a research assistant on the project, has left to start an MSc course in Conservation Biology in Harare, Zimbabwe. Thanks to ICBP-Kenya for assistance towards his first-year expenses.

Lester Short and Jennifer Horne returned to Kenya in May to continue with another season of honeyguide studies at Ol Ari Nyiro, Laikipia. This long-running project is now in its ninth season and much fascinating information continues to be gathered (see the family profile on page 2). James Wachira and George Amutete from the Department were able to spend some time in Laikipia in May learning about the honeyguides.

Also in May, Research Associate Oliver Nasirwa and assistant Kuria Ndung'u left for the Tana River Delta to begin an eight-month survey of the bird-life of this important and increasingly threatened wetland. They will be working closely with Francis ole Nkako of the Kenya Wildlife Service, who is assessing the possibility of setting up a National Wetlands Reserve in the delta region. Funding for this work is being provided by the Dutch government.

ICBP Kenya Section

The Kenya Section of the International Council for Bird Preservation is a volunteer group based in the Department of Ornithology and operating as a sub-committee of the East Africa Natural History Society. ICBP-Kenya is concerned with all aspects of bird conservation in Kenya, its particular aims being to spread awareness of birds and their conservation needs, and monitor threats to species and habitats of particular concern. The Section is the official national representative of ICBP, an international body working for the conservation of the world's birds and their habitats, and with conservation projects in many parts of the world.

ICBP-Kenya has recently taken a number of important steps forward in strengthening its position as a national bird conservation body. In March a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the East Africa Natural History Society, by which the section formally became a sub-committee of the EANHS. This move, it is felt, should be of benefit to both organisations. The funds raised last year have been used towards two major projects: one being the publication of **Kenya Birds**, the other the construction of a hide for observations on the Crowned Eagles in Ololua Forest. This eagles' nest is one of the most accessible

in the country, but this is both a boon and a problem. A nature trail newly constructed by the National Museums of Kenya, who own this patch of forest, runs right under the nest tree and it is feared that this might jeopardise the eagles' chances of breeding successfully. The Museums' Education Department has now agreed to re-route the trail and to allow the building of a new hide some distance away. This will allow the birds to be viewed by students and researchers with a minimum of disturbance. Simon Thomsett is supervising construction of the hide, which is scheduled to begin in May 1992 once the present nesting attempt is safely over. The eagles are certainly sensitive to disturbance: a Danish biologist who was observing them recently from the site of an old hide near the nest was attacked by the female and quite badly cut by her talons.

The Section has also been able to make contributions towards buying a boat for Mwea National Park and assisting a post-graduate student, Peter Kuria, who is studying Crowned Cranes for a degree in conservation biology (*see above).* Preparations are now well under way for the second National Exhibition of Bird Art, which we hope will be as successful as the first. We also now have for sale notelets, postcards and T-shirts which are available in the Dept. Ornithology or the EANHS office. All proceeds go towards bird conservation.

Kenya Wetlands Working Group

The Kenya Wetlands Working Group is an umbrella organisation (operating as a sub-committee of the East Africa Natural History Society) which promotes the wise use of Kenya's vital wetland habitats, as set out in the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance particularly as Waterfowl Habitat. The group consists of conservationists drawn from a variety of institutions.

KWWG's main field activity so far this year has been the January waterfowl counts, organised through the Department of Ornithology as part of an Africa-wide census co-ordinated by the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB). With funding from the Ramsar Convention Bureau, the counts this January were able to involve a larger number of volunteers and trainees (more than 80 in all) and cover a wider range of sites. These included Lakes Magadi, Naivasha, Elmenteita, Nakuru, Solai, Bogoria and Baringo. Results of the counts have been circulated to those who took part.

Lake levels were down from the previous year, and this was reflected in greater numbers of waders at Naivasha, and more ibises and spoonbills at both Naivasha and Nakuru. Numbers of ducks were substantially lower at both these lakes, and the number of Red-knobbed Coots at Naivasha was only half that found a year previously. Encouraging signs were an increase in number of fish-eating birds at

both lakes, and a return of large numbers of flamingos (more than 320,000) to Lake Nakuru. Lake Bogoria had even more flamingos, however, with an estimated 754,200. Copies of the summary report are available from the Department of Ornithology for a nominal charge on request.

A number of wetland issues are causing concern to the group at the moment. Still on the subject of flamingos, there is some worry about the effects of the proposed dams and irrigation schemes on the lower Ewaso Ngiro River, which is the main freshwater inflow to Lake Natron. Natron, an intensely saline lake lying just south of the Kenya–Tanzania border, is the world's chief breeding ground for the Lesser Flamingo. This species flocks in huge numbers at other Rift Valley lakes but rarely manages to breed successfully anywhere but Natron. It appears that Natron alone combines several features which the flamingos need: seclusion from predators, especially mammals; ample *Spirulina* algae to feed on; and fresh water sources for drinking and bathing. Environmental studies of the potential impact of the dam on the flamingo population have reached no clear conclusions, because of a lack of detailed information on the lake's hydrology and the hydrological effects of the dams themselves. What is clear, however, is that any major change to the system, especially cutting or altering the freshwater flows, could potentially have disastrous effects on the flamingos (which in any case only manage successful breeding at erratic intervals). This would have major economic implications, as well as being a conservation disaster.

There are other concerns about the proposed dams and irrigation scheme, although these are difficult to assess without more hydrological data. The proposed scheme involves moving water between catchments, with a transfer from the Mara River system to the Ewaso Ngiro system near the source of the rivers in the Trans-Mara forest. The holding dams involved may flood a substantial area of indigenous forest, and the effects on the Masai Mara/Serengeti ecosystem, and on the wetlands near Lake Victoria which the Mara River feeds, are not clear. The Maasai living along the Ewaso Ngiro's lower reaches have expressed fears about the maintenance of river flows during the dry season, on which their whole pastoral system depends. The absence of wet-season flooding, if the river flow is to be controlled, may also spell the end of the productive fishery and floodplain grazing grounds near the mouth of the river. Perhaps the biggest worry, given the catastrophic record of such projects, is about the social and environmental effects of expanding the present small-scale irrigation network into a much larger scheme. KWWG will be making its views known to the Kenya Power Company and to the project's consultants, Knight Piésold, in anticipation of more hydrological information.

International

Recent months have seen two important international meetings, the Parks Congress in Caracas, Venezuela and the biannual gathering of the Convention for International trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Kyoto, Japan. Over 2,000 delegates attended the first, including a fairly sizeable contingent from Kenya. Papers presented to an international audience included one on attitudes towards tourism and tourist management in the Mara National Reserve (an important area for bird tourism with numerous western and southern species on the edge of their ranges). Many people are concerned about the pressure on the reserve from too many vehicles, lodges, and from specialist interests like hot air balloon rides. The CITES meeting was dominated by the elephant issue, but there are numerous features of CITES which are important, not the least of which is the proper control of trapping and export of wild birds. Trade is banned in Kenya, and efforts are under way to control the thriving trade in Tanzania.

In late September, the Eighth Pan-African Ornithological Congress will take place in Bujumbura, Burundi. It is a quadrennial meeting which brings together ornithologists from all over Africa. The seventh meeting was held in Nairobi in 1988. Details of the Burundi meeting are on the back page.

EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee

The chief concern of the Ornithological Sub-committee of the East African Natural History Society is scientific research concerning birds in East Africa. The OS-c publishes **Scopus,** *an internationally-recognised journal of regional ornithology, and compiles and publishes an annual bird report. The OS-c also assesses the validity of new or unusual records and is responsible for organising the eastern African bird ringing scheme.*

Currently, members of the OS-c are working towards a revised Checklist of East African birds, a first step to replace the previous well-respected list which the EANHS published in 1980. In the last few years, a large number of publications have modified the 1980 list. At the same time, new species have been added to the avifaunas of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The list under preparation will take account of all these changes.

The most recent issue of **Scopus** 15(2), May 1992 includes papers on forest birds of the Uzungwas (Tanzania), Nguuni birds (Mombasa), birds of the Comoro Islands, three new seabirds for Kenya, and one on Palaearctic ducks in Kenya. The 76-page issue also includes 15 short communications. (See the back page for subscription details.)

Bird Family Profiles

1: Honeyguides

Lester Short & Jennifer Horne

The honeyguides, family Indicatoridae, are relatives of the barbets and woodpeckers. They have long intrigued humans, and one species, the Greater (or Black-throated) Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* has been used for aeons by diverse African honey-hunters to help them to locate beehives—and the honey within.

Honeyguides are rather nondescript birds, with grey, olive, brown and white plumage, and are usually inconspicuous; indeed foreign birdwatchers here on safari often see none. Nonetheless, the 16 African species (two others occur in southern Asia) are widespread in forests, woodlands, riverine woods and bushlands, from low elevations to high in the mountains. All species share a striking patch of white in the outer tail feathers, often flashed in flight and display.

Only the Greater Honeyguide actually guides humans to beehives (one led us to four hives in an hour). It uses an insistent chattering call that is at least partly aggressive in context: the honeyguide doesn't beg but rather "demands" that one follows it! The bird is after the beeswax from the hive, not the honey: wax forms an essential part of the diet of these species. Other beeswax-eating honeyguide species in Kenya—the Least *I. exilis*, the Pallid *I. meliphilus*, the Lesser *I. minor*, and the Scaly-throated *I. variegatus* —seem to associate with beehives although they do not guide humans. If you tap or chop wood or build a fire in suitable habitats you may find one or more of these honeyguides has perched close by and is quietly watching the activity. Individuals also watch and monitor other honeyguides, especially the Greater.

As well as feasting on the wax left behind when humans or Ratels *Mellivora capensis* break open beehives, honeyguides also manage to obtain beeswax on their own. African honeybees often abscond from their hives (especially during periods of drought, or when flooded out by heavy rain) and leave much wax behind. Some wax may be pirated from hives on cold days when the bees are sluggish and inactive. Honeyguides have notably thick skins, but they are not immune to bee stings, and are forced to flee if the bees are active. As well as the beeswax eaters, there are a number of small point-billed species (also thick-skinned) that are often called honeybirds. Kenyan species are the Western Green-backed (or Cassin's) *Prodotiscus insignis*, the Eastern Green-backed (or Eastern) *P. zambesiae* and the Brown-backed (or Wahlberg's) *P. regulus*. These birds forgo beeswax and secure their wax from the wax-bearing scale insects (Coccidae)

that they eat.

Ornithologists find honeyguides highly interesting not only because of their wax-eating, honeyguiding habits and thick skin, but also their nest parasitism and associated adaptations. Honeyguides do not care for their young but lay their eggs in the nests of a variety of hole-nesting birds, especially barbets and woodpeckers. Honeyguide eggs hatch rapidly, so that the hatchling honeyguide gets a head start on its nest-mates. It uses a special hook on the bill to wound and kill any other young that may hatch, so that it can monopolize the attention of its foster parents. The hook falls off after a short period. Despite their dull and inconspicuous appearance, many intriguing behavioural interactions occur between honeyguides, between them and their hosts, and with other species.

In coastal Kenyan forests and woodland one can see a variety of honeyguides, including Scaly-throated, Greater, Lesser and Pallid and the Eastern Green-backed and Brown-backed Honeybirds. They are best found, in season, by their distinctive songs and by seeing them near the barbets and woodpeckers who are often their brood hosts.

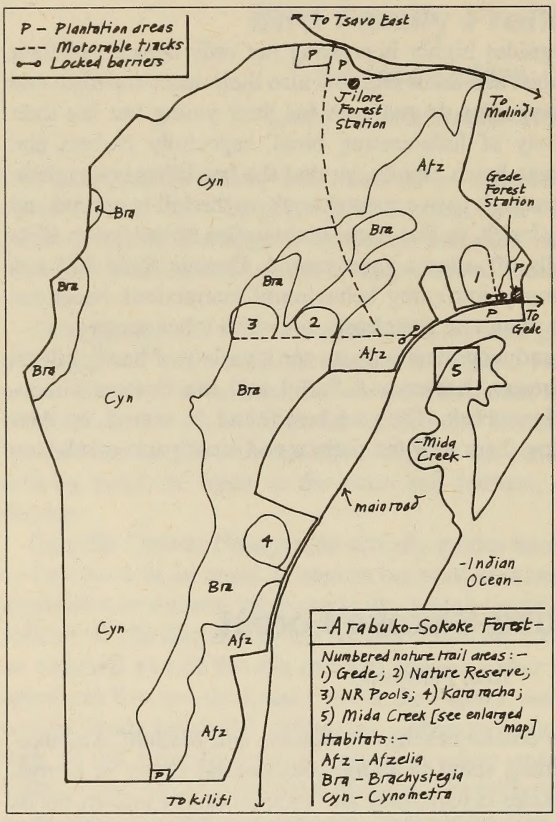
Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

John Fanshawe

Standing just inland from the coastal beaches of Watamu and Malindi, Arabuko-Sokoke is the largest remaining stand of indigenous coastal forest in Kenya. Stretching over 372 km^2, Sokoke is nationally and internationally known for its unique endemic bird species, the Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae* and Clarke's Weaver *Ploceus golandi*.

The low-lying forest barely rises above 60 m at its highest point. Its soils are of two main types: the loose and compact sands and coral rag that dominate the coastal belt and, forming a shelf further inland, a dark red and infertile *magarini* sand-soil. There are no permanent water courses in the forest, though a large river, the Galana, flows to the north. A number of temporary pools and flooded sandpits are the only open water areas and may extend to over 2 ha. Annual rainfall is dominated by a long rainy season in April, May and June, with mean rainfall ranging from below 600 to over 1000 mm per annum in the wetter eastern part of the forest.

Six main vegetation types exist within Arabuko-Sokoke, each with its characteristic birds. Running in a narrow belt through the middle of the forest is



Brachystegia woodland, the main haunt of Clarke's Weaver and Amani Sunbird *Anthreptes pallidigaster*. Such miombo woodland is an important bird habitat throughout Africa and this limited belt represents Kenya's only significant stand. On the red soils to the west is *Cynometra-Manilkara-Brachylaena* forest (to which the Sokoke Scops Owl is confined) and a large area of very dense, low *Cynometra* thicket. A small patch of *Cynometra-Afzelia* forest lies in the north-central part of the forest, while the western edge holds similar *Afzelia* forest, with the highest plant species diversity in Sokoke, and, around the Mida–Gede area, mixed lowland rainforest with *Afzelia cuanzensis, Combretum schumanni, Majidea zanguebarica* and *Hymenea verrucosa*. These forest types hold the best populations of several other characteristic Sokoke birds, including the endangered East Coast Akalat and Spotted Ground Thrush. A small remnant of this rain-forest habitat type stands around Gede National Monument.

Forest management

Presently managed by the Forest Department, the forest plays an important role in Kilifi District, as well as further afield. It provides timber and fuelwood, as well as a stabilising influence on local rainfall. Medicinal uses have been recorded for more than one hundred plant species. Like forests everywhere in Kenya, Sokoke has a long history of exploitation. Since 1932, however, when the

forest reserve was gazetted, the boundaries with the surrounding agricultural land have been maintained. The Forest Department issues licences for timber and fuelwood and, in recent years, the number issued has been reduced in an attempt to manage Sokoke sustainably. With an open boundary stretching over 100 km, the problems of policing are colossal and, despite patrolling and the closing of illegal access points with barriers and other obstructions, a steady flow of timber is poached. There is a real demand for products like corner posts and withies, and legal alternatives to meet this demand need to be provided.

In collaboration with the National Museums of Kenya, the Forestry Department, and the Kenya Wildlife Service, the International Council for Bird Preservation is working in Sokoke with a project of research and monitoring, tourism development, training, and support for management action, all funded by the European Community. The project has its origins in an expedition undertaken in 1983 to study the birds then considered candidates for the Africa Bird Red Data Book, since little was known about them. It emerged that Sokoke, when set against other mainland forests, supported the second most important concentration of rare and endemic birds in Africa.

Conservation research

In terms of forest fauna, project research is concentrating on the birds, small mammals and herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians) with surveys being undertaken to study the effects of habitat modification on all these groups. Ornithological work is mainly concerned with insectivorous species in the *Brachystegia* woodland: for mammals the target species is the unique Golden-rumped Elephant-shrew, while for 'herps', work focuses mainly on lizards and snakes. The ICBP/NMK project is sponsoring two students in Conservation Biology from the University of Nairobi and the herpetological project is being undertaken for a master's thesis. The second master's student is working on seed regeneration in the tree *Afzelia cuanensis*, a forest species which was formerly abundant in Sokoke, but which was selectively logged in the 1950s and 1960s. All the forest research provides data to support management and, particularly, plans towards zoning Sokoke for multiple use. The project works closely with the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Project (KIFCON), with NMK's Coastal Forest Survey (which concentrates on the flora), and with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, which has a field and seed station at Gede.

Forest ecotourism

Every year, the number of people flocking to see Kenya's remarkable wildlife is growing, so much so that the conventional sites, like Amboseli and the Masai Mara, are increasingly overcrowded. At the same time, 'sun and sand' tourists

crowd on to Kenya's fine beaches, but rarely turn their eyes inland. Arabuko-Sokoke stands a few miles from concentrations of hotels at Watamu and Malindi and, in collaboration with the Forest Department, a major aim of the ICBP/NMK project is to tempt visitors to take forest walks. Specialist bird-watching tours already visit Sokoke and the number of such visits has been increasing. It is for non-specialists that plans are being laid, however. If people can be tempted to take a walk in a forest full of fascinating birds, butterflies, ants, and other wonderful small wildlife, an entirely new source of revenue can be opened up to support forest management. To bring this about a small group of guides is being trained to lead forest walks, while a tourist information centre is being constructed at Gede Forest Station. Self-guided walks may be set up at one or two sites close to the main Mombasa–Malindi road, while led walks will penetrate deeper into Sokoke to exploit some of the most beautiful natural forest in Kenya.

Records and Notes

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records to ***Kenya Birds****, please consider the following guidelines. For* ***breeding records****, send in cases of* ***confirmed*** *breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/fledglings. Records of confirmed breeding are useful for* ***all*** *species, even the most common ones; records of nest-building, courtship, etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. You are strongly urged to fill in a* ***nest-record card*** *at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards are free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every second year in the Annual Bird Report of* **Scopus**.

For other records of ***Afrotropical/oceanic*** *and* ***Palaearctic*** *birds, please send in any sightings and notes that you think are of interest. The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For* ***all*** *records, including breeding records, please be as precise as possible about* ***dates*** *and* ***locations****. For sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these records when we begin, very soon, to update and refine the present* Bird Atlas of Kenya *by computerising distribution records.*

Where scientific names are not stated here, the common names follow Britton (ed.) 1980 Birds of East Africa. *Please note that, unless otherwise stated, the records listed here are* ***unchecked****. Supporting details will always be welcomed for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication. Records of certain species are requested for the* **Scopus** *Annual Bird Report (the third issue of* **Scopus** *each year). These should be sent to Don Turner (P.O. Box 48019, Nairobi), who can also supply information on which records are required. For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs, etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the OS-c Rarities Committee.*

Deaths of Pied Crows

In our neighbours' garden, off the Lower Kabete Road, on Loresho Ridge Road before Kibagare Valley, Nairobi, there are a number of large gum trees. At least for the five years in which we have lived there, these have been a roost as well as a breeding area for the Pied Crow (there is also a resident African Goshawk in these trees). There are usually about 20–30 crows which regularly roost. However, in the first two weeks of February their numbers increased quite dramatically and I counted at least 50 one evening.

On 12 February 1992, I found a sick crow and took it to Dr Richardson's clinic. According to my gardener, this bird quite literally fell out of a tree. Over the following three days in our plot alone, three dead crows were found in the morning. At the same time the crows' behaviour has changed. They have been spending a great deal of time at our large bird bath, taking water as well as dropping their food into it (apparently in an attempt to "soften" it).

When not at the bird bath they have been flying almost non-stop, calling all the time, in a circling formation. There was no sign of any large raptor in the area which might have precipitated this; the crows were not "attacking" anything, and my neighbour could find nothing either.—*Mary Sinclair, P.O. Box 30158, Nairobi*

[Editors' note: Mrs Sinclair had collected eight dead crows in this 3-acre plot by 4 March 1992. Veterinarian John Richardson could find no abnormalities or lesions in these birds, which appear to have died of starvation.]

Transmara revisited after two years

When I arrived at Lolgorien on 29 January 1992 it was still extremely dry. Two days later the rains started and the birds became very active. I was told that buffaloes are no longer present but that groups of elephants have invaded the area instead. I did not meet any, but saw many damaged trees and other signs! Somewhere east of Kilgoris forest was being burned to clear land for farming. Between visits to old friends I was able to do some birding: the following are records made between 29 January and 15 February:

Migori River Bridge. Green-backed Heron; pair of Long-crested Hawk Eagles calling; imm. African Fish Eagle; Pygmy Kingfisher; many Black and White Casqued Hornbills, very active; several Joyful Greenbuls; a few Violet-backed Starlings; pair of Holub's Golden Weavers; single Grey-headed Negrofinch; pair of Thick-billed Seed-eaters feeding in a bush.

Lolgorien area. Black Kites, in increased numbers; several Ross's Turacos, noisy; Livingstone's Turaco; three Levaillant's Cuckoos; several Red-chested

Cuckoos; Narina's Trogon hunting insects near ground; several pairs of Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters; African Scimitarbill ; Crowned Hornbills; Ground Hornbill (groups also heard calling); one family party of Grey-throated Barbets; pair of Double-toothed Barbets; several Red-fronted Barbets; Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird; one Lesser Honeyguide near wild bees' nest in fig tree; White-necked Raven (only one bird, seen once: the survivor of the former resident pair?); two Red-throated Wrynecks; several male and female Black Cuckoo Shrikes; pair of Purple-shouldered Cuckoo Shrikes, apparently courting; one Red-capped Robin Chat, chased off by White-browed Robin Chat; male Grey-winged Ground Robin singing at its former nest site; two Tabora Cisticolas; Red-faced Crombec; many Black-backed Puffbacks, often calling; male Red-collared Widowbird (with presumed females—an unusual bird in this area); one Yellow-mantled Widowbird. In my former garden were Bronze, Mariqua, Scarlet-chested, Variable and Green-headed Sunbirds, and a male Northern Double-collared Sunbird, a species new for the area. Could its appearance have anything to do with the burning of forest nearby?—*Annemarie Lohding, Eichelberagstr., 25 W-7166 Sulzbach-Laufen, FR Germany.*

White-breasted Cuckoo Shrike at Makindu

Fiona Alexander *(P.O. Box 42117, Nairobi)* writes: "On 28 January 1992 while birdwatching on Makindu airfield, I had good views of a female White-breasted Cuckoo Shrike *Coracina pectoralis*. It appeared as a totally all-over white bird, until the light struck its mantle, which shone greyish. The reference books all record the myopic, slow inspection of leaves and it was amazing to witness this exactly as described! It worked slowly among the branches, and seemed not only to peer closely at leaves, but even to be listening with its head slightly cocked. I note from *A Bird Atlas of Kenya* that there is a record from similar habitat, i.e. the Tsavo River in 1914". This is the first recent record from Kenya of this rare woodland species, and only the second record east of the Rift Valley. The *Bird Atlas* authors assumed that the 1914 bird was a wanderer, as all other records are from the Elgon-Busia-Kakamega area in the extreme west of the country. Perhaps this view should now be reassessed: certainly birdwatchers in the Makindu area should keep their eyes open!—*Editors.*

Lesser Flamingos breeding at Lake Natron

For the first time since 1984, large breeding colonies of Lesser Flamingos were noted last year at Lake Natron, the most important breeding site for this species

worldwide (see above). An aerial census carried out on 6 November 1991 by Murray Watson, helped by Edward Waiyaki of the NMK Ornithology Department, estimated 1,080,579 adults and juveniles, 171,340 chicks, 464,954 nests in use or recently used and 661,850 long-abandoned nests. Another survey on 7 January 1992 by Gioia Theler and Edward Waiyaki estimated 238,492 adults/juveniles and 134,170 chicks. On 25 January Fleur Ng'weno and other waterfowl counters at Lake Bogoria saw grey juvenile Lesser Flamingos being fed beak-to-beak by adults. Presumably these young had been raised on Natron. The total number of Lesser Flamingos counted in the Rift Valley from Natron to Baringo during January 1992 was approximately 1.5 million.—*Editors.*

Birds of Karapokot

The following is a partial list of birds seen and heard in the Karapokot area of NW Kenya, including the Kongelai Escarpment, Kanyao, Kapchok Mt., Alalo, and Kachagalau Mt, during the period 24–29 December 1991: Bateleur; Augur Buzzard; Yellow-necked Spurfowl; Crested Francolin; Scaly Francolin; Helmeted Guinea-fowl; Buff-crested Bustard; Ring-necked Dove; Emerald-spotted Wood Dove; White-bellied Go-away Bird; Bare-faced Go-away Bird; Hartlaub's Turaco; Spotted Eagle Owl; Scops Owl; Freckled Nightjar; Rufous-crowned Roller; Green Wood Hoopoe; Red-billed Hornbill; Jackson's Hornbill; Grey Hornbill; Red-fronted Barbet; Spotted-flanked Barbet; Moustached Green Tinkerbird; Red-fronted Tinkerbird; d'Arnaud's Barbet; Red and Yellow Barbet; Black-throated Honeyguide; Lesser Honeyguide; Nubian Woodpecker; Drongo; Black-headed Oriole; Fan-tailed Raven; Brown-necked Raven; African Hill Babbler; Northern Brownbul; Common Bulbul; White-browed Scrub Robin; Spotted Morning Thrush; White-browed Robin Chat; Grey-backed Camaroptera; Rattling Cisticola; Wailing Cisticola; Brown Woodland Warbler; Pale Prinia; Northern Crombec; Grey Flycatcher; Pygmy Batis; Golden Pipit; Northern Puffback; Tropical Boubou; Slate-coloured Boubou; Grey-headed Bush Shrike; Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike; Brubru; Rüppell's Long-tailed Glossy Starling; Red-winged Starling; Montane White-eye; White-browed Sparrow Weaver; Grey-headed Sparrow; Yellow-spotted Petronia; White-bellied Canary.—*Yvonne Malcolm-Coe, P.O. Box 48504, Nairobi.*

New atlas square records from Galana

The following are new records for atlas squares 90B–D and 102A from observations made at Galana Ranch on 21–23/3/92: Hamerkop (102A); Secretary Bird (90B); Grasshopper Buzzard (90B); Eurasian Hobby (90D); Yellow-

necked Spurfowl (90D); Black-bellied Bustard (90B); Spotted Thicknee (102A); Violet-tipped Courser (90C); Slender-tailed Nightjar (90D); Eurasian Nightjar (90C); Spotted Eagle Owl (90C); Chestnut-bellied Kingfisher (90B); Red-fronted Warbler (102A). Other interesting birds included Swallow-tailed Kites (two in square 90C on 23/3/92) and European Hobby (one in square 90C on 23/3/92).—*Leon Bennun, Department of Ornithology, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Lesser Flamingo falls prey to Fish Eagle

A Lesser Flamingo was attacked and killed by an African Fish Eagle on Lake Oloidien at the western end of Lake Naivasha on 19 January 1992 at about 08:00. The drama was witnessed by four people—Fleur Ng'weno, Margaret Njeri, Benson Kariuki and Oliver Nasirwa—who were counting waterbirds in and around the lake at Kongoni Farm in one of the annual counts of the Kenya Wetlands Working Group.

The bird counters observed two fish eagles perched on top of some acacia trees about 30 m from the shore. Along the lake shore, in shallow water, were three Lesser Flamingoes wading among Red-knobbed Coots, Little Grebes and Blacksmith Plovers. The group had just finished counting this batch of birds when, suddenly, it happened. A Fish Eagle left its perch and flew, powerfully and swiftly, directly to the flamingos from behind. It took one of them by surprise, striking it on the back with its claws and sending it down into the shallow water. The eagle maintained its grip on the flamingo's back as the flamingo struggled and convulsed in vain under its persistent powerful claws, before going limp after about 30 seconds.

The tackle by the eagle caused pandemonium among the other wading birds, who flew in different directions for safety, uttering distress calls. With its claws still fixed in the flamingo's back, the eagle dragged it to about half a metre from the water. It did this with difficulty, and seemed to be trying to fly off with the carcase. After about a minute the eagle flew off, and the bird counters left the scene to continue the count.

When the counters returned about an hour later, the flamingo carcase was still there, but the heart, liver, parts of its right thigh and most of the abdominal flesh had been eaten. Both legs were severed, left attached to the body only by small pieces of skin and muscle fibres. The flamingo's head and neck were still intact. About a third of the carcase had been consumed in all.

Fish Eagles are common around Lakes Naivasha and Oloidien, where they prey mainly on fish and to a certain extent on relatively small birds such as Red-knobbed Coot. However, at Lake Bogoria, about 90 km north of Lake Naivasha in the Rift Valley, fish eagles are also common even though there are no fish in

this lake. Here Fish Eagles prey primarily on Lesser Flamingos; according to the Warden, William Kimosop, instances of Fish Eagles catching flamingos are often observed. The other common eagle at Bogoria is the Tawny. Tawny Eagles at Bogoria are known to take over the carcasses of flamingos caught by Fish Eagles. They perch near the shores and wait for the Fish Eagles to do the catching.—*Oliver Nasirwa, Department of Ornithology, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Murderous Ground Hornbills

Do waterfowl counters bring out the worst in birds? Above you can read the observations of one group of counters on a Fish Eagle that preferred flamingo to tilapia. During an earlier count this January, at Lake Nakuru, another group witnessed a case of unprovoked and bloody murder by a trio of Ground Hornbills.

The counters in this case were Leon Bennun, Brooks Childress, John Githaiga, Joel Mwangi, Oliver Nasirwa and Willis Okech. The incident took place close to the mouth of Baharini Springs on the northern side of the lake. We had heard Ground Hornbills booming since dawn, and at 09:00 three of them—a pair of adults plus a younger bird—emerged in stately fashion from the acacia woodland that fringes the lake, and strolled towards the springs. On the other side of the small stream running down to the shore was a gathering of Pied Crows, perhaps 50 or more, all standing around near a small bush and doing rather little but utter the occasional 'caw'. When we next looked away from our counting, the hornbills had crossed the stream, surrounded the bush and cornered one unfortunate crow, which was pinned down on its back by the male hornbill's beak. As we watched, all three hornbills began a vicious attack, stabbing and hammering at the crow with their heavy beaks while it made increasingly feeble attempts to escape. This went on for several minutes. At one point the crow, which was still alive, fell into the stream and was fished out by one of the hornbills. The female and immature hornbills continued to peck at it even after it had ceased moving altogether, while the male made little chases around the bush after the remaining crows, which soon dispersed. We had to continue with the count at this stage, but, looking back about five minutes later, we saw all three hornbills pacing away from the scene of the crime in a dignified manner, as if nothing at all had happened to perturb their morning perambulation. At the same time a couple of Marabous shuffled towards the kill.

When we returned to the scene at 10:45 we found blood-stained grass and pebbles at the edge of the stream, but apart from a few feathers there was no sign of the dead crow. Presumably either the Marabous had disposed of it, or it was

gulped down by one of the hornbills (quite a substantial mouthful) while our backs were briefly turned.—*Leon Bennun, Department of Ornithology, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi.*

White Stork ring recovered

Graeme Backhurst, the EANHS ringing scheme organiser, reports information received from the Polish ringing office in Gdansk on a White Stork ring found in Endebess on 18 May 1989. The bird had been ringed in Bilgoraj, Poland on 22 June 1987 as a nestling and was therefore just under two years old when it died. It had flown at least 5600 km from its birth-place.—*Editors.*

Breeding Records

This report also includes the more unusual records (indicated by asterisks) from nest-record cards submitted since October 1991.

Ostrich: *Three females and one male at nest with 17 eggs, Kimana area, 27/9/91 WO; *female incubating & pair with >10 very small young, Nairobi NP 13/10/91 CD. **Harrier Hawk:** *One full-grown chick in nest, Langata, Nairobi, 19/2/92 FN & WMBw. **African Goshawk:** *Building in 9/91, still sitting tight by 16/10/91 in site used since 1982, Karen, Nairobi CD. **Crowned Eagle:** *Downy chick in nest, Ololua Forest, Nairobi 3/10/91 CD. **Grey Crowned Crane** *Balearica regulorum*: A pair with half-grown immature, Kericho 11/2/92 AL. **Kori Bustard:** *One well-grown juv with two adults, near Kiserian 7/6/92 FN & BN. **Green Pigeon**: Feeding half-grown fledgling, Banita 21/1/92, nest deserted 28/1 IM. **Brown Parrot:** *Juvenile by nest hole, parent in and out of hole, Koru 6/10/91 KB; *one juv fed by adult, Kimwarer, Kerio Valley 6/10/91 VGW. **White-crested Turaco:** *Juvenile fed by adults, Kimwarer, Kerio Valley 20/9/91 VGW. **Levaillant's Cuckoo:** *Juvenile seen in a group of eight Arrow-marked Babblers, Mara River 18/2–17/3/92 WO & ES. **Spotted Eagle Owl:** Chick first flew on 24/12/91, Lake Baringo HG. **Verreaux's Eagle Owl:** *Juvenile calling for food, edge of Ololua Forest, Nairobi, 27/9/91 JW. **Montane Nightjar:** *Female sitting on C2, Nairobi 25/9–7/10/91, brooding two young 22/10/91 JW; one tiny chick in nest under a bush, adult bird flushed, feigned injury, Lolgorien 13–14/12/92 AL. **Speckled Mousebird:** Building nest from old nest material, incubating C3, Lolgorien 10/2/92 AL. **Scimitarbill:** *Two adults feeding two juvs, Nairobi 6/3/92 JW. **Crowned Hornbill:** Adult feeding juv., Naro Moru 28–31/3/92 and 20/5/92 MH. **Spotted-flanked Barbet:** *Parents feeding at nest, Kimwarer, Kerio Valley, 8/2/92 RHB & VGW. **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird:** *Adults feeding at nest, Nairobi 29/2/92 MS. **Cardinal Woodpecker:** *Female feeding juv, 0°22'S, 35°17'E 24/4/91 KB. **Black-headed Oriole:** *Pair sitting, Nairobi 6–19/5/92, nest deserted 20/5 JW. **White-bellied Tit:** *One juv fed by adults, Nairobi 22/4/92 WMBw. **Common Bulbul:** Adult feeding juv, Naro Moru 6/3/92 and during 5/92 MH. **Northern Olive Thrush:** Neatly made nest by Naru Moru River, December 1991, broken blue egg shell found underneath, January 1992 MH. **Northern Crombec:** *Nest seen, Kimwarer, Kerio

Valley 25/6/91; two fledglings 30/6/91 VGW. **Pale Flycatcher:** Three pairs each with 2–3 immatures following, Lolgorien 29/1–15/1/92 AL; *juv fed by adult, Nairobi, 22/4/92 WMBw. **Silverbird:** Constructing nest in acacia tree, near Governor's Camp entrance, Masai Mara GR 29/1/92 AL. **Paradise Flycatcher:** Nest with two very young chicks 30/1/92, Lolgorien, destroyed two days later AL. **African Pied Wagtail:** Feeding fledglings, Lolgorien 29–15/2/92 AL. **Blue-eared Glossy Starling:** Two adults feeding three juvs, Naro Moru 25/5/92 MH. **Bronze Sunbird:** Goose feathers used to line nest in garage, abandoned due to human activity, Naru Moru 22/2/92 MH. **Variable Sunbird:** Adult with young at nectar drinker, Kericho 1/92 IWF. **Green-headed Sunbird:** Adult with young at nectar drinker Kericho 1/92, IWF, another feeding nectar to immature at Naro Moru 1–2/92 and 9/3/92 MH. **Grosbeak Weaver:** Female feeding immature Naro Moru 18/11/91 MH. **Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver:** *Two juvs fed by adult, Kimwarer, Kerio Valley 30/7/91 NW. **Purple Grenadier:** Pair with four immatures, Lolgorien 29/1–15/2/92 AL.

Other records: Afrotropical and oceanic species

Single **Masked Booby** together with a **Noddy** and **Bridled Terns** fishing in open sea off Watamu 14/4/92 LD. **Dwarf Bittern:** One found in a store at Kenya Polytechnic, Nairobi, 20/12/91; was presumably on migration. **Little Egret** and **African Reef Heron:** Many roosting, Funzi Island 18–21/10/91 PW. **Green-backed Heron** and **White-backed Night Heron:** Ramisi River 21/10/91 PW. **Woolly-necked Stork:** Ramisi River 21/10/92 PW. **Wahlberg's Eagle:** Two at Tigoni, 15/3/92 and 22/3/92 JH. **Bat Hawk:** One in vlei by Naro Moru River 23/1/92 MH, two at Naro Moru River Lodge 27/3/92 PN. **Crowned Eagle:** A pair flying and calling, Ngong Hills 22/1/92 YM. **Sooty Tern:** Immature found dead on beach at Malindi 4/12/91 JG. **Dark Chanting Goshawk:** Hunting together with Black-tipped Mongoose, Lake Baringo 12/92 HG. **Cuckoo Hawk:** Karen, Nairobi 5/2/92 WMBw. **Swallow-tailed Kite:** Two at L. Nakuru NP 11–12/1/92 FN & KWWG. **Harlequin Quail:** Female in grounds of National Museums of Kenya, agitated and unwilling to fly 19/6/91 WO & FK. **African Finfoot:** Ramisi River 21/10/92 PW. **Heuglin's Bustard:** Three, Koobi Fora 6–8/3/92 YM. **Red-necked Phalarope:** Landed in swimming pool at Malindi 26/2/92, one foot missing, dead next morning JG. **Cream-coloured Courser:** Koobi Fora 6–8/3/92 YM. **African Skimmer:** Six L. Nakuru 12/1/92 YM. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Frequently recorded, Lake Baringo Club 2/92 HG. **Slender-tailed Nightjar:** Koobi Fora, 6–8/3/92 YM. **Lilac-throated Roller** *Coracias caudata lorti:* One, L. Bogoria 26/1/92; previous sightings of this race include Chanler's Falls 1/74 and Upper Hill, Nairobi 1974 YM; one, Lake Nakuru NP 11–12/1/92 FN & KWWG. **Scimitarbill** and **Abyssinian Scimitarbill:** Seen within a few km of each other, Shimba Hills 2/92 FA. FA notes that Scimitarbill was in relatively thickly forested valley, Abyssinian Scimitarbill on crest of a lightly bushed ridge, confirming expected habitat segregation. This is a new record for atlas square 114A for Abyssinian Scimitarbill. **White-throated Bee-eaters:** Flocks noted at Arroket Estate, Sotik on 20/11/91 and 24/3/92 IWF. **Pale Prinia:** Lake Baringo Club 2/92 HG. **Magpie Starling:** Feeding in fruiting Neem trees and date palms along with Wattled, Blue-eared Glossy, Rüppell's Long-tailed, Bristle-crowned and Superb Starlings, Lake Baringo Club 2/92 HG; huge flocks at Mtwapa in fig trees, end of 1991 MR. **Shining Sunbird:** Pair, Lake Baringo Club 2/92 HG. **Paradise Whydah:** A flock of males and females in breeding plumage, by main road near Naro Moru 25/3/92 MH.

Other records: Palaearctic species

Steppe Eagle: Several immatures and adults, L. Bogoria 2/1/92 YM. **Osprey:** Funzi Island 18–21/10/91 PW; Lake Naivasha 8/3/92 MS. **White Stork:** About two hundred flying north and settling in the distance, Lolgorien 12/2/92 AL. **Black Stork:** "Carnivore", Nairobi 8/4/92 WMBw. **Eurasian Bee-eater:** Great activity, presumably preparing to migrate, Arroket Estate, Sotik 23/3/92 IWF. **Eurasian Wryneck:** Searching for grubs in a Frangipani tree, Banita Sisal Estate 20–27/1/92 and 2–12/2/92 IM. **European Golden Oriole:** Funzi Island 18–21/10/92 PW. **Eurasian Swallow:** "One exhausted bird flying past on the open sea off Watamu" 14/4/92 LD. **Rock Thrush, Willow Warbler, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat:** "Carnivore", Nairobi, 8/4/92 WMBw. **Nubian Shrike:** First adult ever recorded for Baringo joined a juv at Lake Baringo Club, 12/91–2/92 HG.

Contributors

AL, Annemarie Lohding; BN, Bettina Ng'weno; CD, Charles Dewhurst; ES, Edwin Selempo; FA, Fiona Alexander; FK, Fidel Kyalo; FN, Fleur Ng'weno; HG, Hilary Garland; IM, Ian Marshall; IWF, Mr & Mrs IW Francombe; JH, Jean Hartley; KWWG, Kenya Wetlands Working Group waterfowl counters; JW, Janet Wood; KB, Kimbo Beakbane; LD, Lallie Didham; MH, Mavis Heath; MR, Marlene Reid; MS, Mary Sinclair; NW, Norman Wilson; PN, Peter Nicklin; PW, Pat Wootton; RHB, R.H. Berry; YM, Yvonne Malcolm-Coe; VGW, V.G. Wilson; WMBw, Wednesday morning bird walk; WO, Willis Okech.

Profile in Action: David Ngala

David Ngala is a key member of the ICBP/NMK Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Project. Known locally as the "owl-man", David was born in Mbale, Kilifi district in 1952. His home was near the forest boundary and early days in Sokoke forged an interest which has never dimmed. After school in Dida and Ganzi, David joined the Forest Department where he has now worked for 22 years.

Taken on first as a casual in the Jilore nursery, various other jobs led to his becoming Stores Clerk at Jilore Forest Station. Even after joining the Forest Department, David spent a lot of his spare time in the forest itself. In 1983 he met members of an University of East Anglia-ICBP team who were surveying the endemic Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae*. David recalls his delight at learning the technique for finding owls in their dense habitat. You mimic their tinking call, establish a duet, and then, slowly but surely, creep in towards the bird and spotlight it with a torch.

After the expedition team left, David continued to follow up the scops owls whenever an opportunity allowed. In 1984, he was transferred to work as a lorry driver in Gede Forest Station, a base which is much closer to the tourist resorts of Watamu and Malindi, and which began to bring him into contact with birders. Later that year, Tom Gullick, a well-known birder from Spain, became the first

overseas visitor David led in to find the owl.

When the ICBP Arabuko-Sokoke Forest project began in 1990, David was the obvious person to take on as the first of the project's trainee guides. His birding has gone from strength to strength and, as news of access to the forest spread, more and more people have come to see the owl. Since 1990, a further 93 groups have travelled in for the experience.

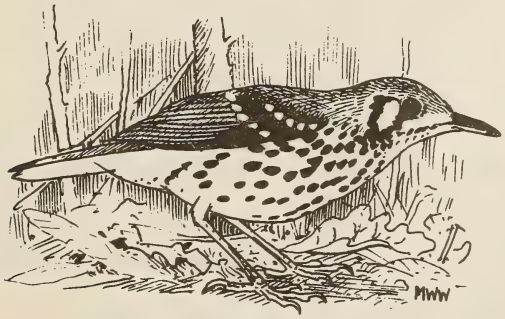
Owling apart, David's skills are allowing lots of birders to see other difficult birds, like Sokoke Pipit *Anthus sokokensis* and East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi*, as well as a host of other Sokoke regulars like Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrikes *Prionops scopifrons* and Little Yellow Flycatchers *Erythrocercus holochlorus*. Since the start of 1992 he has led groups from Finland, Denmark, Great Britain, the USA and Sweden on birding walks in the forest.

Threatened birds of Kenya

1: Spotted Ground Thrush

Leon Bennun

The Spotted Ground Thrush *Turdus fischeri* (*Zoothera guttata* of more recent classifications) can fairly be described as an enigma. It is one of the best examples in Africa of a so-called "relict species": a bird that was left behind in isolated spots as its habitat retreated. The habitat in this case is dense evergreen forest. Five races are now recognised: one each in the coastal forests of East Africa and Natal, one in a few tiny patches of mountain forest in southern Malawi, one in the Imatong Mountains of southern Sudan and one in south-eastern Zaïre. This wide but fragmented distribution indicates a species that has seen better days.



Spotted Ground Thrush—*Martin Woodcock*

Not only is the species fragmented in range, it is very rare everywhere that it occurs. The Kenyan race was thought to be extinct for many years, since there were no certain records from its first collection in 1885 until it was "rediscovered" in 1964. The Malawi race hangs precariously on, with a population probably numbered in tens. The Zaïre and Sudan races are each known only from single specimens and have never been seen in the wild! Even the Natal race is rare and under severe threat from destruction of its dense coastal forest habitat.

Both the Kenyan and the Natal races are known to be migrants. In Kenya the birds are present only from around late March to November, and there is no evidence that they breed in this country. Until recently their breeding grounds were unknown, but birds with brood patches have been caught recently in forest on the Rondo Plateau in extreme southern Tanzania. There may be other breeding populations in northern Mozambique, where there has been very little ornithological exploration.

During their stay in Kenya, Spotted Ground Thrushes are present at very low densities throughout the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. Their preferred habitat, however, seems to be a few tiny patches of thick coastal forest on coral rag soil, such as Diani, Jadini and Gede. Here the birds occur at much higher densities, estimated as up to 2.9 birds/ha in Gede (although this may be on the high side). Because these patches of forest are so small, however, Sokoke still probably holds the bulk of the non-breeding population.

The habits of the Spotted Ground Thrush do not lend themselves to an easy unlocking of its secrets. It is one of the most elusive and inconspicuous birds imaginable, its dappled plumage providing superb camouflage on the forest floor. A ground thrush under observation may remain motionless for minutes at a time, before hopping away into a thicket once it thinks you have taken your eye off it. The birds are also very silent as they feed. Nonetheless, detailed research at Gede has allowed us to understand a little more about its biology. Each thrush appears to move in a well-defined home range of about 1400 m^2 . They prefer areas of forest with dense shade and thick leaf litter, together with thickets of tangled vegetation into which they can retreat when threatened. They spend most of the day hopping quietly amongst the leaf litter, picking up insects and millipedes. Unlike other ground-feeding birds in these forests, they do not appear to follow ant swarms. One striking feature of the Gede population is that each individual seems to return to the same home range within the forest year after year, despite presumably making a long journey of thousands of kilometres to the breeding grounds and back. Annual survival is at least 67% per year, indicating that these are relatively long-lived birds.

What is the future for the Spotted Ground Thrush? We can say little about threats in the breeding quarters at the moment, although it is clear that coastal

forests in general are a highly-endangered habitat, and there are certainly no grounds for complacency. In Kenya, the patches of coral rag forest that the bird favours have all but disappeared beneath a wave of tourist development sweeping across the coast; only the future of Gede seems secure, but this 37 ha forest can support only a small number of birds, perhaps 50 to 100 at the very most. Even here, recent studies show depressing indications that architectural renovation (carried out no doubt with the best of intentions) has destroyed some prime ground thrush habitat and reduced the bird's numbers. Survival for this handsome and intriguing thrush thus seems to rest on the conservation of the still-extensive Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. Let us hope we will not need again to consign it to Mackworth-Praed and Grant's category, "probably now extinct".

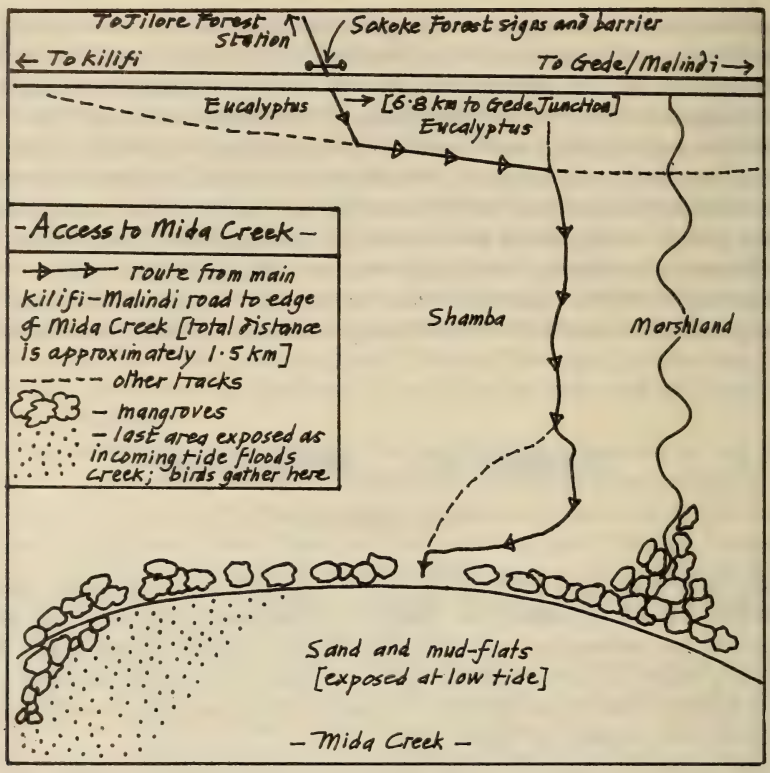
Birding at . . . Mida Creek

John Fanshawe

Mida Creek is the most important site for wintering birds on the Kenya coast. It provides a good opportunity to observe a wide range of waders and terns, including the extraordinary Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*. Some 5,000 birds regularly winter on the sandbanks along the side of the creek, particularly its inner reaches. Finding the best place to watch birds is not easy, however. There are really two options: by land or water.

Land approaches should be made via the network of tracks that lead from the main Mombasa–Kilifi–Malindi road. The best entrance is opposite the Jilore track barrier to Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, about 6.5 km south of the Gede–Watamu road junction. Drive or walk down a track through *Eucalyptus* trees (a Forest Department plantation) for 150 m, then turn left for 400 m, and right again, following a fairly straight sandy road which takes you after about 800 m to the edge of the creek. The tracks are passable to four-wheel drive vehicles, even in the rains, but may become inaccessible to other vehicles. This is the best area for shorebirds, especially on an incoming tide when birds are pushed closer and closer to the mangroves fringing the creek. The mangroves form an excellent natural hide and you can get very close to waders if you are patient. Note that the creek is home to fishermen who are entitled to fish there, using traditional methods. Security is normally good, but care should be taken to lock cars and hide valuables or, if possible, leave someone watching over your vehicle.

Sea approaches mean hiring a boat from one of the hotels in Watamu or joining an organised trip. Contact Ocean Sports (Watamu 32008) or Turtle Bay Hotel


To Jilore Forest Station
Sokoke Forest signs and barrier
← To kilifi
To Gede/Malindi →
Eucalyptus
[6·8 km to Gede Junction]
Eucalyptus
-Access to Mida Creek-
route from main Kilifi-Malindi road to edge of Mida Creek [total distance is approximately 1·5 km]
other tracks
- mangroves
- last area exposed as incoming tide floods creek; birds gather here
Shamba
Marshland
Sand and mud-flats [exposed at low tide]
-Mida Creek-

(Watamu 32256) for details. Travelling by boat can get one very close to a number of species, including Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus*, which regularly winter in the creek. Other interesting species include Black Herons *Egretta ardesiaca* and, at certain times of year, large numbers of Carmine Bee-eaters *Merops nubicus*.

Tide times are normally displayed in the foyers of most of the coast hotels. Copies of tables are available from many of the Malindi shops including Nimmy's in the arcade near Barclays Bank or from the Kenya Ports Authority.

This article is the first in a series which we intend to publish to help people find interesting birding spots all around the country. Through the Department of Ornithology we aim to sell information sheets to help raise money for a bird conservation fund. Space in ***Kenya Birds*** *is limited, but the sheets will have maps and more extensive notes on the sites. Contact the department for details.*

Children's Section

Guineafowl *by Fleur Ng'weno*

Did you find
a spotted feather
on the ground?
Do you see
the scratch marks
in the dust?
Can you hear
the piping calls
from the bush?
There they run,
wings arched high,
bouncing as they go.
Now whirring wings,
loud chirring calls,
they take to flight.

Did you see
their spotted feathers
on khanga cloths?
Did you feel
their arching wings
in Kisii stone?
Did you hear
their noisy voices
in Grandmother's tale?
Hunter's quarry
and barnyard fowl:
Bird of Africa! The Guineafowl.

Helmeted Guineafowl—*Arabron Osanya-Nyynéque*

Bird Facts... Bird Facts... Bird Facts...

Did ***you*** know that...

— The bird with the **longest wings** is the Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* which spends its life soaring over the southern oceans. The largest example had wings spanning 3.6 m—more than twice the height of a tall man.

— Among **landbirds**, the birds with the **longest wings** are the Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* and the Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus*, an American vulture that lives in South America; each may have wings spanning up to 3.2 m.

— The **highest-flying** bird ever recorded was a Rüppell's Griffon Vulture *Gyps rueppelli* which collided with an aeroplane at 11,274 m above sea level. This is more than twice the height of Mt Kenya!

— The **commonest** bird in the world is probably the Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*. This species causes a lot of damage to crops in Africa, where the population is estimated to be about 1,500 **million** birds. One roost may contain several million individuals.

More "Bird Facts..." in the next issue.

Have we used the wrong address for you?

Do you know someone else who would like to receive **Kenya Birds**?

Write and tell us...

Editors, Kenya Birds

Department of Ornithology

National Museums of Kenya

P. O. Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya

Bird Events

Wednesday Morning Bird Walks led by Fleur Ng'weno, Damaris Rotich, Pat Wootton or Maryanne Kamau. Meet at 8:45 a.m. in the museum car park for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but are asked to join the Society (see below).

The VIII Pan-African Ornithological Congress is taking place in Bujumbura, Burundi from 30 September–5 October 1992. Details are available direct from Dr Michel Louette, 8 PAOC, Africa-Museum, B-3080 Tervuren, Belgium (fax + 32 2 7670242) or from the Department of Ornithology. This meeting takes place every four years and was held in Nairobi in 1988.

International Council for Bird Preservation ICBP in Cambridge publish a quarterly magazine called **World Birdwatch** which is the voice of the organisation and its supporting **World Bird Club**. Details of this and other aspects of ICBP's work from International Council for Bird Preservation, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge CB3 OPJ, U.K.

East Africa Natural History Society All birders in East Africa should join this Society, which offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus. Sub-committees of the Society include the OS-c and ICBP-Kenya (see above). The EANHS also organises ringing and nest record schemes in eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 742131/61, ext. 278, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P.O. Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open on Monday and Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings.

Scopus the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the OS-c and can be obtained from the OS-c Hon. Treasurer and Secretary Don Turner, P.O. Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel: Nairobi 48133). The annual subscription is currently KSh 150 (KSh 160 up-country) (overseas rates available from Don Turner). The third issue of **Scopus** each year is the East African Bird Report. It includes a general account of birds in East Africa for the preceding year as well as interesting records of Palaearctic and Afrotropical birds. Records are welcomed: see page 10.

For sale: ***Annotated Checklist of the Birds of East Africa*** by Lester L. Short, Jennifer F.M. Horne and Cecilia Muringo-Gichuki will shortly be available through the Department of Ornithology. As described in the last newsletter, the book provides a list of East African species in modern taxonomic order with a discussion of the taxonomy of each, the English name used and reasons why, and a brief up-to-date account of distribution and habitat. The book will cost KSh 700. A separate field check-list will be available at KSh 100. Orders can be placed with Cecilia Gichuki through the Department.

ICBP–Kenya offers for sale notelets (showing attractive pen and ink drawings by Dale Zimmerman), postcards (showing the endemic birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in a painting by Norman Arlott) and T-shirts (with a Crowned Eagle motif by Simon Thomsett). All these are available from the Department of Ornithology. The proceeds go to bird conservation projects.

Contacts For ICBP-Kenya, Kenya Wetlands Working Group and the EANHS Nest Record Scheme, as well as queries concerning *Kenya Birds*, write to Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131–4, 742161–4 extension 243.

Kenya Birds, Volume 1, Number 1: June 1992

Contents

Section	Page
Editorial	ii
News from Kenya and abroad	
Department News	1
ICBP-Kenya section	2
KWWG News	3
International News	5
OS-c News	5
Bird Family Profiles 1: Honeyguides	6
Arabuko-Sokoke Forest	7
Records and Notes	10
Profile in Action: David Ngala	18
Threatened birds of Kenya 1: The Spotted Ground Thrush	19
Birding at... Mida Creek	21
Children's section	23
Bird events: Notes, Contacts, Events and Announcements	iii

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES
3 9088 00997 2969

Crested Helmet Shrike—*Dale Zimmerman*